

LUNA LODGE  
Route 66 Recording Project  
9119 Central Avenue Northeast  
Albuquerque  
Bernalillo County  
New Mexico

HAER NM-13  
*NM-13*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

### LUNA LODGE

HAER No. NM-13

Location: 9119 E. Central Avenue, Albuquerque, Bernillo County, New Mexico.

UTM: 13.359100.3882100, Albuquerque East Quadrangle.

Dates of Construction: 1949, 1950, 1952, 1954, 1964

Present Owner: Suresh A. Patel

Present Use: Motel

Significance: Luna Lodge is one of the best examples of a largely unaltered tourist court remaining along historic Route 66 in New Mexico.

Historian: Richard Brandi, with contributions from Christopher H. Marston, HAER Project Leader.

Project Information: Documentation of the Luna Lodge was undertaken by the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), part of Heritage Documentation Programs, National Park Service, Richard O'Connor, Acting Manager. The project was conducted in conjunction with the NPS Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program, National Trails System, Michael Romero Taylor, Manager, and the 2006 Southwest Summer Institute for Preservation and Regionalism (Chris Wilson, Director; Chester Liebs, Adjunct Professor) at the School of Architecture and Planning, University of New Mexico, Roger Shluntz, Dean. Field recording and measured drawings were produced under the direction of Christopher H. Marston, assisted by Dana Lockett, HAER Architects. The team included Arnold Valdez, Adjunct Assistant Research Professor; and Dominic Duran, Colin Morris, Patrick Ellison, and Julie McGilvray (all of the University of New Mexico). The historical report was produced by Richard Brandi, Goucher College. Large format photographs were produced by Martin Stupich. Assistance in all phases of the project was provided by Kaisa Barthuli, NPS Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program Deputy Program Manager.

## Chronology

- 1926            Route 66 designated to run from Chicago to LA. In New Mexico, Route 66 originally follows an “S” curve across the state through Santa Fe, then north/south along 4<sup>th</sup> Street in Albuquerque, to Los Lunas then west towards Grants.
- 1937            Route 66 realigned and straightened in New Mexico, and runs east/west on Central Avenue through Albuquerque, bypassing Santa Fe and Los Lunas. “Dust bowl” migrants use Route 66 to reach California.
- 1941-1945      Route 66 becomes an important highway for transporting supplies and personnel during World War II.
- 1950            Luna Lodge opens on Central Avenue (Route 66) with eight units in a single wing, one of 118 motels in Albuquerque.
- 1950-1952      Luna Lodge builds additions, with a second floor above the office, additional wings forming a U-shape, and a coffee shop, growing to twenty-six rentable units.
- 1954            Swimming pool, bath house, and playground added in rear.
- 1958            Luna Lodge is an average size for motels along Highway 66 in Albuquerque with twenty-six rentable units.
- 1962            Interstate 40 opens in Albuquerque, through traffic bypasses Central Avenue.<sup>1</sup>
- Ca. 1964        Second floor porch enclosed.
- 1969            Luna Lodge is not included in a pamphlet of Albuquerque’s “Major Hotels and Motels.”
- 1980            Current owner Suresh Patel buys Luna Lodge. Aunt Billie’s, a long time tenant of the café space, continues its lease.
- Early 1980s    Citing safety concerns, Patel closes the swimming pool, and converts the bath house to a unit with a kitchenette. With the addition of a trailer in the rear, there are now a total of twenty-eight rentable units.
- 1985            Route 66 decommissioned nationwide.
- 1998            Luna Lodge placed on National Register of Historic Places as part of a multiple property listing for Route 66 historic sites.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Cassity, “Route 66 Corridor National Historic Context Study,” December 2004, Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program, National Trails System Office, National Park Service, 250.

<sup>2</sup> Twelve motor courts were among eighteen properties listed for Central Avenue. See Appendix.

- 1999 Congress passes legislation to create a Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program.
- 2001 Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program office is officially established within the National Trails System Office, National Park Service.
- 2006 Luna Lodge recorded by HAER as part of University of New Mexico's Southwest Summer Preservation Institute course.

## Introduction

U.S. Highway 66, popularly known as "Route 66," the first all-weather highway linking Chicago to Los Angeles, became the conduit for thousands of travelers heading west during the four decades of the mid-twentieth century. During the Depression, the war years and through much of the postwar period, thousands traveled Route 66 in search of a better life or to enjoy the attractions of the West. Route 66 has become an icon of the freedom and opportunity provided by the American highway for people all over the world.<sup>3</sup>

As traffic grew along Route 66, so did the need for roadside businesses such as gasoline stations, restaurants and motels. Motels evolved from the primitive campgrounds of the 1920s and the motor cabins of the early 1930s to "motor courts," with greater creature comforts such as private bathrooms, daily linen service and eventually TV, phones, air conditioning and swimming pools. Luna Lodge was built in 1949.<sup>4</sup>

At the peak period of use in 1955, there were ninety eight motels along Route 66 in Albuquerque. Today, fewer than forty pre-1955 motels remain.<sup>5</sup> Luna Lodge was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998 joining ten other Route 66 motels in Albuquerque. When nominated for listing, Luna Lodge was called "one of the best examples of a largely unaltered tourist court remaining along Route 66 in New Mexico."<sup>6</sup>

## Description

The Luna Lodge is a complex of four one-story buildings, including one with a two-story addition. The buildings contain a total of twenty-eight rentable units and are arranged in a U-

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<sup>3</sup> Statement of Significance section in "Special Resource Study, Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program," Report, National Trails System Office, National Park Service, July 1995.

<sup>4</sup> David Kammer, "The Historic and Architectural Resources of Route 66 Through New Mexico," New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, October 1992, 101-104; David Kammer, "Luna Lodge," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, August 1996, section 7, page 2.

<sup>5</sup> Don J. Unser, *New Mexico Route 66 On Tour Legendary Architecture From Glenrio to Gallup* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2001), 57.

<sup>6</sup> David Kammer, "Luna Lodge," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, August 1996, section 7, page 2.

shaped plan enclosing an asphalt covered parking lot.<sup>7</sup> The west wing is approximately 250' long, 20'-23' wide, and 11' tall (19'-4" at office). The north wing is approximately 60' long, 18' wide, and 11' tall. The east wing is approximately 192' long, 17' wide and 11' tall. The motel office is located on the ground floor of the west wing, nearest the street. Above the office, a second story provides living quarters for the owner. The front portion of the office has a roof with an overhang matching the shape of the curved wall. Large, multi-pane metal casement windows wrap around the office. On the second floor, a large picture window faces south. A neon sign, which is a replacement of the original, combines both straight and zig-zag elements on the parapets of the building tracing the outline of the building. At the south end of the east wing is a detached restaurant, approximately 24' wide and 40' long, with the entrance door covered by a security gate on the south, or street facade. Metal casement windows cover much of the south façade facing Central Avenue. A neon sign, with a large arrow pointing down towards the property, is located at the entrance at Central Avenue.

The structures are constructed of stucco-covered, concrete blocks with a series of private doors opening onto a parking lot in the courtyard. A series of casement windows, many with wooden lintels, are located on both sides of the structures. A stucco-covered canopy projects 2'-7" over each door. The doors are wood panel with no lights. An exterior light fixture exists for each room unit; each is independently controlled by an exterior light switch near the door. The roofs are flat with shallow parapets. The top of the walls are slightly rounded. The walls are stucco covered with several vents spaced along the elevations near the tops of the walls.

The north wing units feature an 11'x17' bedroom in front, with a bathroom and closet in the rear. The four units alternate between wide- and narrow-oriented rooms. Radiant heat was installed in all concrete floors. A system of 2" radiant heat pipes was laid in a bed of pea gravel beneath a 4" concrete slab.<sup>8</sup> Concrete block party walls were installed between every two units, with parapet walls extending through the roof. There is cut tile lettering spelling "LUNA LODGE" on the south facade of the north wing. In the east wing, guests enter a 4' vestibule facing a 5' wide closet. The 13'x15' bedroom is situated to the side, and a bathroom is behind the closet. The only windows on the rear wall of the east wing are in the bathrooms.

## History

Humans inhabited the Albuquerque area as long as 12,000 years ago. American Indians settled the area and during 1100 to 1300 A.D. established several communities throughout northwestern New Mexico. In 1540, Francisco Vazquez de Coronado, in search of the mythical Seven Cities of Cibola, spent the winter in an Indian pueblo 20 miles north of Albuquerque. Spanish settlers followed but it wasn't until Spanish General Don Diego de Vargas arrived in 1692 that European settlement began in earnest. With independence from Spain in 1821 came Mexican governance to be superseded by the United States as a result of the Mexican War of 1848. After the end of the U.S. Civil War, settlers began arriving in greater numbers. The coming of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad in 1880 was a further impetus to growth. Albuquerque was

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<sup>7</sup> Owner Suresh Patel lists thirty-one total units for tax purposes, which includes three units in the two-story office. He also counts the trailer in the rear as one of the twenty-eight rentable units.

<sup>8</sup> Allied Engineering Service blueprint, sheet 4 of 5, Job No. 501000, 12 December 1950.

incorporated in 1885 and statehood followed in 1912 when New Mexico was admitted as the 47th state.<sup>9</sup>

In 1926, in an effort to improve the nation's inadequate highway system, the federal government designated a series of numbered roads running across the country. The route from Chicago to Los Angeles officially became known as U.S. Highway 66. In New Mexico, Route 66 ran in a "S-curve" pattern, traveling from Tucumcari west to Santa Rosa, north through Santa Fe, then passing south through Albuquerque along Fourth Street to Los Lunas, where the highway then turned west towards Grants and Gallup. In order to shorten the highway through New Mexico, and in response to lobbying efforts by Albuquerque city boosters, the route was realigned in 1937 to follow a more direct east/west orientation.<sup>10</sup> After the realignment, Route 66 traveled west from Santa Rosa through Edgewood and Moriarty, entering Albuquerque from the east to traverse the city along Central Avenue. The highway then continued due west through Budville and Laguna to Grants. A variety of roadside businesses sprang up along Central Avenue to serve the increasing number of tourists and farm migrants during the Depression.<sup>11</sup> World War II brought increased demands on the highway for hauling cargo to Pacific ports of debarkation and carrying workers to western defense plants.

The founding of Kirtland Air Force Base in 1940 and Sandia National Labs in 1949 spurred wartime and postwar growth in Albuquerque. The widespread availability of air conditioning and the GI Bill fueled Albuquerque's growth. Following the war, the availability of automobiles led to a boom in auto tourism as increasing numbers of vacationers were drawn to the Southwest. This created additional demand for road side businesses including motels along Route 66.

## **Design**

Luna Lodge is typical of postwar motor courts catering to travelers and vacationers arriving by automobile. The motor court form evolved from earlier motor campgrounds and motor cabins and provided greater amenities such as a private bathroom and laundry service. Luna Lodge is also typical of the motor courts found in Albuquerque from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s with its narrow U-shaped layout, office and residence at the front, location directly on the street (rather than set further back as in smaller towns where land was less expensive), parking court with trees and a central lawn (not extant but visible in historic photos), and garages (which were later enclosed to create additional sleeping units). Luna Lodge is also typical in its use of modest construction materials such as concrete block covered with stucco.

Luna Lodge exhibits many of the classic features of the Pueblo Revival period (1910-present). Identifying features of the Pueblo Revival are: flat roof with parapet; wall and roof parapet with irregular, rounded edges; projected wooden roof beams, (vigas) extending through exterior walls;

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<sup>9</sup> Albuquerque Convention & Visitors Bureau website, see <http://www.abqcvb.org/abqinfo/history/>, accessed July 2006; City of Albuquerque, "Historic Route 66 Map & Guide," November 2000.

<sup>10</sup> David Kammer, "Route 66 Through New Mexico: Re-survey Report," March 2003, New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, 14.

<sup>11</sup> David Kammer, "The Historic and Architectural Resources of Route 66 Through New Mexico," October 1992, New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, 68.

and stucco wall surfaces. Pueblo Revival also features blunted or rounded corners, irregular stuccoed wall surfaces, exposed window lintels and wood columns. A stepped back roof line reminiscent of the original pueblos is often used.<sup>12</sup> Luna Lodge exhibits nearly all of these features. It has changed very little over time except for additions, which follow the same stylistic elements.

The early owners of Luna Lodge lived in the motel as was common at the time. The first owners, John Jelso and his wife Dorothy, lived on the premises from its opening until 1955 when they sold it to Marion O. Simpson and his wife, Mary. The Simpsons also resided in the motel.

The design follows a pattern in motor courts in making incremental additions and offering additional amenities over time in an effort to keep up with the competition. The original Luna Lodge had one wing, perpendicular to the street, with an office in front and eight units interspersed between eight garages. In 1950, the Jelsos added a four-unit north wing and a four-unit east wing. By 1952, they had extended the east wing to ten units, converted the garages into additional units (making a total of twenty-six), added a second floor to the owner's quarters, and built a coffee shop to complete the U-shape complex. In 1954, they installed a swimming pool and playground in the rear, and put air conditioning and televisions in the rooms. Sometime after 1964, the second-story porch was enclosed.<sup>13</sup>

The Luna Lodge's original sign was a large wood sign set on two posts. A large neon arrow accompanied by a plastic backlit sign later replaced the original around 1964. Large signs were important since there were no national brands or advertising to entice travelers. Catching the attention of drivers as they passed by was the primary means to attract customers. Hence the use of neon signs to grab the attention of weary drivers at the end of the traveling day.

The plans for the original Luna Lodge are believed to be those dated June 30, 1948, by F.H. Wolford for John and Carl Jelso. Although the motel name on the plans says "Laguna Lodge," the design is so similar to the current west wing of the motel that it is believed these plans apply to Luna Lodge. Archival research did not uncover any references to a Laguna Lodge ever being built in Albuquerque.<sup>14</sup>

Fred H. Wolford was a draftsman for the Eidal Manufacturing Co., a trailer manufacturer in Albuquerque. He also drew the architectural plans for a four-unit east wing addition to Luna Lodge in 1949. By December 22, 1950, Allied Engineering Service completed the engineering drawings for this addition, including a radiant heat layout. The second story additions to the office were made according to drawings dated July 8, 1952, by Bill J. Shelton, a designer located at 120 South Morningside in Albuquerque. It appears that no architects were involved in the

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<sup>12</sup> Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1984), 435-437.

<sup>13</sup> Luna Lodge postcards, found at: [www.66postcards.com/cardsnm9.html](http://www.66postcards.com/cardsnm9.html), <http://www.66postcards.com/images/xx49.jpg>, accessed July 2006. Because the Cadillac in the photo is either a 1963 or 1964 model, the second floor was not filled in until sometime after this date. The Cadillac is a 1963 or 1964 DeVille model, 4 door, 4-window sedan, with a small tail light/fin on top and a smooth bottom tail light assembly.

<sup>14</sup> "Laguna Lodge," drawn by F. H. Wolford, 30 June 1948.

original design or subsequent additions to Luna Lodge. If so, this was a common practice of the era as contractors, builders, or sometimes the owners themselves designed the motels.<sup>15</sup>

## **Economic History**

Luna Lodge may have reached its peak by 1960 as evidenced by the progression of the size of the ads in the Albuquerque telephone directory and other sources. In November 1950, Luna Lodge had a small, nondescript listing. In 1954, there is a larger listing which mentions the swimming pool, playground, air conditioning, TVs, and AAA. In 1956, Luna Lodge was listed in a Chamber of Commerce brochure for Albuquerque's 250th Anniversary, "Enchantorama of Albuquerque," as a member of the Albuquerque Motor Court Association. In 1958, there was a still larger telephone directory listing for Luna Lodge, boasting phones, free TV in every room, wall-to-wall carpeting, electric and steam heat, heated swimming pool, tub and shower combinations or tile showers, coffee shop, and member of AAA.<sup>16</sup>

According to a list of motels dated September 25, 1958, Luna Lodge had twenty-six units, almost exactly the average size (twenty-seven) of motels on Route 66 in Albuquerque. In 1959, the telephone directory ad had a graphic (not a photograph) featuring a pool and the neon arrow sign in the logo design. The following year the telephone ad is similar with the additional information that credit cards are honored (Hilton-Carte Blanche, American Express, Diners).

In 1961 the listing in the telephone directory reverts to a small size with no accompanying ad. This small size is used in the telephone directory every year thereafter until at least 1970. This suggests that the motel could not afford to pay for a more expensive listing or that large listings and ads were not cost-effective in attracting customers. Luna Lodge was still listed as a recommended motel along with several others along Central Avenue for the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) convention at the Albuquerque Convention Center in 1968, with rates of \$6.00 single, \$7.00 double-1 bed, \$10 double-2 beds. However, by 1969 it was not included in a pamphlet of "Major Hotels and Motels" put out by the Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce.<sup>17</sup>

Luna Lodge faced an increasingly difficult economic time during the 1960s and 1970s. This is not surprising as similar types of motels gradually dwindled through the 1960s after Interstate 40

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<sup>15</sup> Information gathered from blueprints lent by Sam Patel, including "Luna Lodge Addition," signed by Fred H. Wolford, 22 Nov 1949; Allied Engineering Service, sheets 1,3,4 of 5, Job No. 501000, 12 December 1950; "Additions to Luna Lodge," Office of Bill J. Shelton, Designer, sheets 2, 3 of 3, 8 July 1952; and an unlabeled draft of Luna Lodge east wing, no date.

<sup>16</sup> Information gathered from: Albuquerque City Directories, various years, (El Paso, Texas: Hudpeth's Directory Co. Publishers); "Albuquerque Progress," January 1948-December 1958; Albuquerque & Vicinity Classified Telephone Directories, 1947-1970, Mountain Bell; "Enchantorama of Albuquerque," New Mexico Chamber of Commerce, 1958 [pamphlet], Public Library, City of Albuquerque.

<sup>17</sup> Albuquerque Telephone Directory; "Convention Preview: ASRM Annual Meeting, February 12-16, 1968," found at <<http://jrm.library.arizona.edu/data/1967/206/prev.pdf>> accessed 30 August, 2006.



bypassed Albuquerque and as national chains with greater amenities made motel courts less desirable.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of the challenges of operating on East Central Avenue, Luna Lodge has benefited from steady ownership since 1980. Born in Mumbai, India, Suresh A. Patel, came to the U.S. in 1971 to pursue a degree in architecture at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and earned U.S. citizenship. In 1974 he worked with the New York State Department of Health and became involved in both the design of health facilities and the care of sick patients. Due to his son's asthmatic condition, he moved his family to Denver and then to Albuquerque, where he acquired Luna Lodge in 1980. Since then he has made several upgrades to the property while keeping its vintage character. Changes include cutting off the radiant heat and installing gas heating, replacing all the "storm coolers" or window A/C units, installing new hot water heaters, and replacing the water and sewer lines. He has kept Luna Lodge in business by renting to several veterans on a monthly basis. He takes care of his long term tenants like family, by driving them to the doctor, and offering them vouchers at La Norteñita, the Mexican restaurant on site. He even keeps a few rooms available for the Route 66 enthusiast, but Patel sighs, "Once upon a time I used to get a lot of tourists, but now, we're lucky to get one." While he seems to have reached a happy medium to keep the Luna afloat, a developer has recently approached Mr. Patel with an offer to buy the motel property. If this occurs, it is unknown what the future will hold for the Luna Lodge.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

The Luna Lodge is significant for being a largely unaltered 1950s tourist court and for its historic association with the golden age of Route 66 tourism. It is also a good example of the postwar Pueblo Revival style. It continues to stay in business as a motel in an increasingly challenging environment along East Central Avenue, an historic but economically depressed area of Albuquerque.

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<sup>18</sup> John A. Jakle, Keith A. Sculle and Jefferson S. Rogers, *The Motel In America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 49.

<sup>19</sup> Erik Siemens, "Route 66: Illuminating Path," *The Albuquerque Tribune*, 21 February, 2006; Interviews with Sam Patel by the UNM HAER team.

APPENDIX

**Albuquerque Motor Courts on the National Register of Historic Places:**

<b><u>Name of Motor Court</u></b>	<b><u>Address (West to East)</u></b>	<b><u>Date Placed</u></b>
El Campo Tourist Court	5800 Central Ave. SW	1/13/1994
Hilltop Lodge	5410 Central Ave. SW.	1/9/1998
El Vado Auto Court	2500 Central Ave. SW.	11/22/1993
Tower Courts	2210 Central Ave. SW.	11/22/1993
Horn Oil Co. and Lodge	1720 Central Ave. SW	1/9/1998
Modern Auto Court	3712 Central Ave. SE.	11/22/1993
Aztec Auto Court	3821 Central Ave. NE.	11/22/1993
De Anza Motor Lodge	4301 Central Ave. NE	4/30/2004
Tewa Lodge	5715 Central Ave. NE	6/11/1998
La Mesa Motel	7407 Central Ave. NE.	11/22/1993
Luna Lodge	9119 Central Ave. NE	6/11/1998
La Puerta Lodge	9710 Central Ave. SE.	1/9/1998

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## **Drawings**

"Laguna Lodge." Drawn by F. H. Wolford, 30 June 1948.

"Luna Lodge Addition." Signed by Fred H. Wolford, 22 Nov 1949.

"Sheets 1,3,4 of 5, Job No. 501000." Allied Engineering Service, 12 December 1950.

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Unlabeled draft of Luna Lodge East Wing, no date.

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